



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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## Washington growers turn to WSDA in fraud, theft cases

**OLYMPIA** – While growers are starting to harvest hay and early-season produce, they also need to focus on their bottom line, including getting paid promptly. The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) is ready to respond to complaints of theft, fraud and other unfair business practices growers encounter.

WSDA's Agricultural Investigations Program licenses more than 800 dealers, brokers, agents and cash buyers of livestock, produce, hay, seed and other crops. In most cases, WSDA requires licensees to purchase a bond.

Farmers sell to agricultural dealers under a wide variety of agreements ranging from consignment to cash payment. While the majority of transactions are completed without problems, if there is a dispute, the farmer can file a complaint with WSDA. The agency's investigations are funded through fees paid by licensees.

"Our approach is to bring the two parties together to negotiate," said Bob Radke, WSDA's investigations supervisor based in Yakima. "Our goal is to get to a mutually agreed upon solution as soon as possible so the farmer can get paid."

Last year, WSDA resolved 21 formal cases and recovered \$102,000 for producers. Nine of the cases involved hay growers.

Some disputes are resolved informally and quickly. Last month, one of the investigators received a call from a Columbia Basin hay grower saying he was owed \$7,800. The investigator made a phone call and in less than 48 hours worked out a payment agreement between the two parties.

Other cases can involve international trading partners and include working with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Last year in three cases, WSDA recovered \$16,000 in livestock and hay proceeds due from Canadian operators.

Investigations usually involve reviewing contracts, examining transaction records, conducting interviews and locating the individual, products or livestock. Bounced checks from dealers have been resolved through payment plans. WSDA investigators work closely with county prosecutors when criminal sanctions for insufficient-fund checks, theft or fraud are appropriate.

"We work hard to protect producers and pass on suggestions on how to take care of the contract and payment part of their operations," said Jerry Buendel, manager of the agency's Agricultural Investigations

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Program. “Our program is well regarded by both producers and the regulated businesses because our three investigators consistently produce good results for the growers and the licensees.”

Before entering into agreements with dealers, farmers are encouraged to check the licensing status of the individual or business before they give up possession of their crops. Growers need to review contracts carefully, retain paperwork, and ensure they have full names, addresses, phone numbers and vehicle license tag numbers of their business partners.

WSDA program outreach efforts include speaking at the Northeast Washington Hay Growers Association annual meeting and staffing a booth at the Washington State Hay Growers Association Conference.

Growers can check licenses or file a claim through the [Agricultural Investigations Program](#) website, by calling (509) 249-6961 or (360) 902-1857, or by e-mailing [commerch@agr.wa.gov](mailto:commerch@agr.wa.gov).

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